

Women farmer groups (WFG) in Armenia

In 2004, through support from the USDA Marketing Assistance Project, women farmer groups - Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and Local Extension Research Groups (LERG) - were established in Armenia. From the very beginning and till now Green Lane experts and specialists have been working with these groups, providing them with technical assistance and consultancy. The groups are involved mainly in Organic Agriculture and Integrated Pest Management research and training activities in Tavush, Lori, Kotayq, Ararat and Syunik regions of Armenia.

Training courses conducted by WFGs during the last two years increased interest in organic farming in their communities. Now men also express willingness to take part in seminars and field days held by women groups.

Two young women active in FFS and LERG projects, **Armine Muradyan** (Lori) and **Emma Hakobyan** (Tavoush), took part in training and exchange programs on alternative agriculture in Armenia and Romania. Now as certified trainers they cooperate with Green Lane, visiting along with other specialists rural communities throughout Armenia and sharing knowledge on alternative agriculture techniques and technologies.

“They have done an excellent job here,” said Charles Basham, USDA MAP Research Coordinator. According to Dr. Basham, these people have been successful in identifying the main problems, doing research and finding solution for themselves and, moreover, are willing to share these solutions with their neighbors. “I remain convinced that this is one of the most hopeful things that are going on in agriculture in Armenia today,” said Dr. Basham.

Throughout the world there is an increasing recognition of the role women play in developing organic farming. As mothers and wives, they are particularly aware of the crucial importance of sound organic food to their families. 27 years old Emma says that concern for her own family was the main reason for becoming an organic farmer.

However the experience of organic farmer groups in Armenia evidences that ecological farming can be a profitable business. The production of organic farmers is being sold through a relatively large network of clientele. Currently the capital city of Yerevan is the main 'consumer' of the organic food in Armenia.

Last year the members of Gandzaqar Organic FFS (Tavoush region) took part in the Harvest Festival in Armavir region.

- It was a proud moment, - they say, - when our 'organic basket' full of fruits was sold by auction at the highest price. This also evidences that people realize the true value of organic food.

In 2007 three more WFG will be established through support from Green Lane NGO, ACH and World Vision.

- For the first year this will require about 4000-4500 USD, but the costs will go down over next two years, - Green Lane experts say.

Specialists estimated, that usually it takes four years to sustain the activities of farmer groups. After this period of time members of the groups start making gains and are able to buy the necessary agricultural inputs and market production by themselves.

Green Lane really appreciates what is being done by women farmers in Armenia. This year special prizes will be awarded to the women who lead many other people to the 'true green revolution'...

